

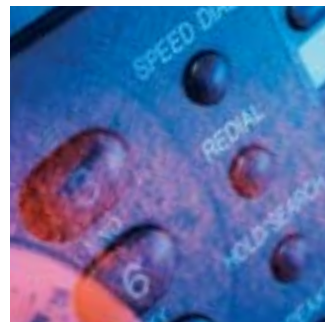


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# Power to the fax

Tom Linhard, president of FaxCore, demonstrates why automating integrated fax within .NET applications is alive and kicking – and crucial to mission-critical commercial communication



**W**hen Microsoft unveiled its .NET platform a few years back, there were naysayers who doubted its viability. Today, .NET-based applications are enabling IT departments to easily integrate disparate applications, reduce turnaround time and increase productivity. In fact, forward-thinking IT pros are harnessing the power of .NET by targeting existing technologies, such as fax, and transforming them into powerful business transaction tools that deliver necessary business documents at Internet speed.

To gain more perspective: a fax server solution consists of three components – a LAN-connected PC running a Windows OS such as Windows 2000 or Windows Server 2003, fax application software, and an intelligent fax board from companies such as Brooktrout.

A fax server offers the potential to deliver fax communications to every workstation and application in the organisation. In seconds, users can send or retrieve a fax from their PC. Fax servers, due in part to the design, become a central repository for every fax transmission that enters or leaves the company. When an urgent need to search, retrieve or retransmit these important business communications arises, organisations are relieved by the knowledge that the document is accessible from a single source with powerful search tools.

## fax is not dead

While some may roll their eyes at the thought of fax in today's 'paperless office' environment, the demise of fax has been greatly exaggerated. The fact is that faxes increasingly continue to drive many strategic business functions and processes. For legal purposes, many documents just cannot be sent in electronic form via e-mail, due to the requirements of legal signatures and confirmed delivery. Add the proliferation of spam e-mails and viruses into the mix and it becomes even

more difficult to confirm delivery of the documents that move business.

## reliability

Ask anyone to choose between Internet/e-mail and the telephone as the most reliable and secure communications tool, and the answer will always be the telephone network. E-mails often replace a non-commercial telephone call; however, with commerce applications, the accepted practice is to send a fax or request an order by fax. Fax messages travel over the most reliable and secure transport available – the telephone network. When was the last time a fax machine or fax server was down and out of service because of a computer virus? Fax servers continue to be a valuable business tool because the technology always delivers the documents that commerce relies upon, with safe, secure and confirmable delivery.

The next generation fax servers also act as an enabler by easily and transparently providing a means to fax-enable ERP, CRM, purchasing and other back-office applications. In addition, fax servers double as a commercially necessary legal archive of all incoming and outgoing correspondence. The challenge is to find innovative ways to incorporate automated faxed information into our evolving digital world.

In fact, one software development company based in Copenhagen is implementing a fax server solution for use with products such as Microsoft Visual Basic. This organisation is leveraging the API programming possibilities both in .NET and COM to connect with the fax server solution to obtain transaction IDs, send time, status, and more.

In another instance, a Netherlands-based company needed to connect its in-house developed .NET software with a computer-based fax server solution. On a regular basis, the company's in-house application can generate



more than 3,000 faxes in a matter of minutes, and each one must be successfully and quickly sent to the final destination. This significant fax volume requires more than 100 fax lines and a seamless integration between the company's .NET based application and another .NET based fax application to provide fast, scalable and reliable delivery of fax transmissions. A next generation fax solution offering a Web services design provided the scalability and fault tolerance required for mission-critical fax services.

## integration and automation

Entire industries would come to a halt without faxes, including manufacturing, financial services, retail, government/public sector, education, legal, travel, healthcare and food services. Integrating automated fax saves time and cost. Legal documents, purchase orders, stock trade confirmations, airline and hotel bookings, insurance contracts, engineering drawings, blueprints, patient records, and high-level federal information are just a few of the documents that are driven by fax communications. They not only contain unalterable text, but also possibly vital graphical information.

As organisations continue to downsize,

automating this process is vital, since there are not enough staff to perform just administrative functions such as fax. Manually faxing documents is archaic and a colossal waste of time and valuable resources.

If your organisation is considering a next generation fax solution that utilises the Microsoft .NET framework and which offers a service to deliver seamless, XML, .NET, VB, browser and e-mail-driven fax communications, contact Microsoft or an integrator that specialises in delivering computer telephony applications.

A properly implemented fax automation solution will enable an organisation to streamline processes, improve workflow and ultimately reduce costs. The key to implementing a successful computer fax solution is to work with a company that understands the software application side as well as the telephony side, which is a rare combination, but well worth the effort in locating such a partner.

Fax is not going away any time soon. The fax server continues to play an increasingly vital role and has evolved into a mission-critical component of the business process and technology infrastructure. ☐

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